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SUBJECT: MARTIN BURSİK, MEAN GREEN CHAMELEON, POSSIBLE
KINGMAKER

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[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. It looks increasingly likely that the Czech Green Party will cross the 5% threshold in the June 2-3 parliamentary elections, and have a say in the formation of the next coalition government. Martin Bursik, who became Chairman of the party six months ago, and who is given credit for the party's recent rise in popularity, has been a member of several political parties throughout his career, and is likely to compromise on many issues that are fundamental to party activists at the grass roots level. But Bursik is unlikely to cut deals with politicians he has wrangled with in the past, particularly some within the current front-runner, the Civic Democrats (ODS). END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (U) The most frequent criticism leveled against Bursik is that he has too often changed his political stripes. Before November 1989, Bursik was an activist with the Movement for Civic Freedom (Hnutí za občanskou svobodu). After the political changes in November 1989, he helped found Civic Forum. In 1990, he went to the US to work as a legislative intern for several months in the office of Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA), as part of a USAID program. Bursik continues to call Congressman McDermott a friend and hosted the Congressman during his visit to Prague. After Bursik returned to then-Czechoslovakia, he was elected to the Prague City Council as a member of the Free Democrats, one of the parties that emerged after the breakup of Civic Forum. He was the Deputy Chair of the party from 1993-1995, but quit in April 1996, staying on the city council as an unaffiliated independent. In February of 1998, he was made Minister of the Environment under the Tosovsky caretaker government, a post he held for roughly six months. After the end of the caretaker government, he ran for Mayor of Prague on the Freedom Union ticket, losing out to the ODS candidate. In February 1999, Bursik was again elected to the Prague City Council, this time as a Christian Democrat (KDU-CSL.) He made something of a name for himself as a corruption fighter, but left that party in 2003, complaining of a lack of space to implement environmental initiatives. He joined the Greens in June of 2004, and joined the party leadership four months later. He became party chair in September 2005. Many critics say that Bursik has simply rebranded himself again, that he is nothing more than a new face for old political forces associated with Civic Forum and former President Havel.

[1](#)3. (U) Bursik won the Chairmanship of the Greens last fall after a series of fairly acrimonious and personal duels with his predecessors, Jakub Patocka and Jan Beranek. Patocka now says Bursik is a careerist who will compromise on any issue in order to gain a share of power. Patocka feels that Bursik has betrayed the values that motivated the party for its first fifteen years. Patocka calls Bursik, "an ambitious

political manipulator." Beranek went on to work as a regional coordinator for Greenpeace. Bursik says that Patocka is naive and would have negotiated with the Communists. Bursik complained that his predecessors managed the Greens like a small NGO rather than a serious political party. Many observers doubt whether the recent surge in opinion polls could have been possible under Bursik's predecessors.

14. (U) Many point to the past tensions between Civic Forum, and the Civic Democrats, then led by current President, and ODS Honorary Chairman, Vaclav Klaus, as one of the reasons ODS has trouble deciding what to do with the Greens now. Bursik and Klaus did not like each other in the 90,s and those tensions continue to this day. A year ago, after President Klaus chose not to support a bill that would have promoted the use of renewable sources of energy, Bursik called a press conference to list what he referred to as "The Ten Mistakes of President Klaus." More recently, Bursik criticized Klaus for his opposition to a bill to permit registered partnership for homosexuals. Local political analysts are unanimous in their belief that Bursik would not support Klaus,s re-election as president in 2008. While Bursik has shown flexibility on many issues, his animosity towards Klaus and the Klaus supporters inside ODS is probably unshakable.

15. (U) It is believed that many within ODS now favor a grand coalition with CSSD, over other post-election outcomes, including a coalition with the Greens. In the event of a grand coalition, Klaus would have a reasonable chance of being reelected, and Klaus support, Prague Mayor Pavel Bem (ODS), though not on the ballot, could be asked to take over leadership of the party, since he has experience working with Prime Minister Paroubek within the Prague city government, and since current ODS chair Miroslav Topolanek is opposed to

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a coalition with Paroubek. In April, 2006, Bem launched an attack against Bursik, claiming he had violated conflict of interest standards by receiving city funds to renovate personal property while a member of the city council. The attack was later taken up by Bem's assistant, Deputy Mayor, Jan Burgermeister.

16. (U) Bursik is on the advisory board of Green Budget Germany (GBG), a German NGO that lobbies both within Germany and internationally, for ecologically-based tax reform. In December 2005, in Berlin, Bursik presented his plan to introduce such a tax in the Czech Republic. He also repeated his desire for such a tax during a March, 2006 lunch with Ambassador Cabaniss. Meanwhile, also in March, Vladmir Zelezny, controversial former Senator, current MEP, and independent candidate in the upcoming elections, let it be known that he had heard from EU Green members in Brussels that the German Greens had given Bursik,s party 1.5 million Euro to help them with their campaign. Unlike the current Minister of the Environment, Libor Ambrozek, Bursik has been quiet on the controversial subject of German waste illegally shipped into the Czech Republic.

17. (U) In March 2006, the Czech Daily, Mlada Fronta Dnes, ran a story about the personal wealth of the leaders of the five main political parties. Bursik is the richest of them all. He has income from four properties he owns, including the renovated house next to parliament in Prague. He acknowledged having the equivalent of US\$15,000 in his bank account.

18. (U) Bursik went through a well-publicized divorce in the late 90,s after openly dating Jitka Obzinova, a former reporter for Czechoslovak TV and later moderator of a debate program on TV Nova. Bursik,s former wife, Ivana Bursikova, is still active in public life, running the NGO she started many years ago, AGORA.

19. (U) Bursik is an avid climber and has climbed in Nepal,

Tibet, the Caucasus and several countries in South America.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT. Bursik has changed his political affiliation many times, though his interest in environmental issues is long-standing. He knows a great deal about energy and environmental science and will want to pursue principled policies, where possible. But his position on many specific issues, such as nuclear power or foreign deployments, usually considered non-negotiable among traditional Green Party members, could be surprisingly flexible. Bursik is a veteran politician, a profession that demands compromise and in this respect he differs from the activists who used to steer the party. When Bursik was Environmental Minister, in 1998, he approved operations at the Temelin Nuclear Power Plant, earning him a prize as the "Environmental Enemy of the Year."

And when Bursik took over the reins of the party last year, he was asked whether he was bothered by the fact that the Greens, only representative, Senator Jaromir Stetina, had supported the U.S. occupation of Iraq, in defiance of the party's platform, Bursik said "no." (On the Greens election platform, foreign affairs is the seventh of seven issues. One line on terrorism reads, "This is an issue that touches us all. Security can not be compartmentalized, as the attacks in New York, Madrid, Istanbul, London and elsewhere have shown. But using pre-emptive war, or cultural confrontation to deal with these threats is something the Greens consider bad, foolish, and counterproductive.")

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: Not long ago the Greens were a rag-tag bunch of activists at the grass roots level. Bursik, 45, might succeed in making the party into a lasting and influential force in Czech politics. The opportunity is there. Many Czechs are weary of the current political parties and long for something new. In addition, the emergence of the Greens comes at a time of rising standards of living and increased attention to quality of life issues. But the leap from untarnished political movement to successful coalition partner is one that will involve much give and take. Bursik has so far done a good job of selling the party to the public. If he succeeds in the election, he will have to sell political realities to the party.
CABANISS